

public citizens for children + youth

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Children Still in Recession in Chester County Despite Recovery *Rising child poverty and lower student achievement casts shadow over modest gains*

Philadelphia (Oct 26, 2016) – While recent headlines tout a national recovery from the Great Recession, more children in Chester County are facing hardships than during the depths of the recession, a new study has found.

Public Citizens for Children and Youth [PCCY] announced new comprehensive reports on the status of children in Philadelphia, Delaware, Montgomery, Bucks and Chester counties, entitled, “Left Out.” The Chester County report was released today.

“An American tragedy is happening right before our eyes, yet it’s very hard to see. The headline news touts a strong economic recovery, and monthly jobs reports amplify that message. But PCCY dug into the data and in Chester County found a very different and alarming story that does not bode well for children or the county,” said Donna Cooper, Executive Director of Public Citizens for Children and Youth.

The new PCCY “Left Out” series unveils a Child Wellness Index that measures if children are worse off or better with respect four domains: K-12 education, early childhood education, health and economic well-being. Compared to 2008 when the recession was just beginning, children in Chester County are faring worse in the economic well-being domain. Their health status has not improved, while their situation has improved minimally in the early childhood and K-12 education domains.

“It’s pretty startling that in eight of the 16 Index measures, children were faring worse in Chester County compared to 2008. Even where children are doing better, thousands of children are up against very bad odds,” said Cooper.

Economic Rebound Still Not Reaching Children

“It’s startling to see that even in one of the wealthiest U.S. counties, we have such a significant number of children growing up in poverty, and that the recovery has not reduced that number. The cost of living here is high so PCCY’s policy remedies become even more important, and engaging school districts is critical – not just because school lunch and breakfast programs are critical for poor children, but because there are still over 1,000 Chester County children without health insurance. No child should be without health insurance in Pennsylvania.” – Frances M. Sheehan, President and CEO, Brandywine Health Foundation



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- Five years after the recession (2015), Chester County had a child poverty rate of 7.2%, or 8,542 children, still higher than the 5.5% at the start of the recession.
- Among the children in poverty, 2,847 are living in families earning less than half of the poverty level (\$10,000 or less per year for a family of three), more children than are enrolled in the entire Octorara Area School District.

Most School Districts Have Less Funds Even With More Students Who Need Extra Help

*“We have some terrific school districts in Chester County, but each year we see more children who need extra help to succeed. And our ability to help them is hampered by a broad range of unfunded mandates and the state’s resistance to putting up its fair share of public school funding. That’s one reason we’ve seen district budgets across the county that require tax increases. As a school board member I know how hard it is to ask our neighbors to pay more in taxes. But we have little choice. We work very hard to run our district as efficiently as possible to keep taxes down. But I know that if a tax increase is necessary to ensure a high quality education, we have to do so. I can’t let down the children in my community. They come first.” – **Kate Shaw, School Board Director, West Chester Area School District***

- By 2014, one in five public school students in the county were from low income families. Meanwhile, the elimination of Stimulus state and federal aid in FY 2011 meant that school districts had, overall, about \$8,000 less per classroom to educate students in 2014, making Chester County the lowest spending suburban county.
- As a result, student performance declined. Nearly 6,200 third through eighth grade public school students could not pass state reading assessments in 2014, a full 17.7% of students in the county. This fail rate is about the same as in 2008, erasing all progress that had been made up to 2012. Progress in math was also lost, with 1,000 additional students failing compared to 2012.

Access to Quality Early Learning Experiences Improved, But Most Poor Children Still Not Given this Smart Start

*“Children soak up so much in their first five years, setting patterns that will help or hinder learning for the rest of their lives. It’s the most effective time for intervention – both in terms of cost and impact – especially for a child who shows a delay or disability, or whose life circumstances put her or him at risk. And evidence shows that typically developing, middle-class children also benefit enormously from high quality early childhood education. Yet so many children are missing their chance; that’s why we should advocate for investing more in kids.” – **Dr. Joseph O’Brien, Executive Director, Chester County Intermediate Unit***

- Young families are struggling with the rising costs of child care in Chester County, where three out of five children under six years old have all parents in the workforce. Full-time childcare for two children (a preschooler and an infant) rose 28% since 2008 to about \$25,300, the most expensive of any suburban county.

- More children in publicly subsidized child care were in high quality programs in 2014 compared to 2008, but still two out of three cannot get access to those programs due to shortages in public funds. Meanwhile fewer children were able to enroll in publicly funded pre-k, with 84% of eligible children in the county unable to enroll in high quality pre-k due to lack of public funding, the largest share of any suburban county.

Spike in Uninsured Children and Disparities in Health Outcomes Stand in Way of Progress

“It’s heart-breaking and exasperating to tell a parent that we can help her apply for insurance for her baby but not for her nine year old son who does not have immigration papers. All Chester County children no matter where they were born should qualify for public health insurance. Both the moral and economic evidence is convincing.” – Alain Oliver, Executive Director, Maternal and Child Health Consortium of Chester County

- Despite reductions in the rate of uninsured children through the recession, the rate more than doubled in 2014 to 6.8%, making Chester County home to more uninsured children than any other suburban county. Many of these children don’t have the option to enroll because of the state’s ban on undocumented children’s access to public health insurance.
- Racial health disparities are becoming more dramatic. In 2015, 19% of white children were obese, while the rates for black and Hispanic children were more than twice as high at around 45%. Likewise, 5% of white children did not see a dentist in 2015 compared to 13% of black and 15% of Hispanic children.

Public Policy Helped Reduce Senior Poverty but Didn’t Do So for Children

- In every county, the economic recession affected thousands of children and seniors, increasing the numbers in poverty at its low point. But unlike seniors, where effective public policies helped them recover more quickly in every suburban county, children were not afforded the same protections. These policies include Medicare, Social Security, Pennsylvania State Prescription Coverage (PACE), Pennsylvania Property Tax and Rent Rebates and state tax policies that exclude retirement earnings from state taxation.
- From 2008 to 2015, the child poverty rate has been about 3 percentage points higher on average than the senior poverty rate in Chester County. In 2012, the senior poverty rate began to decline, two years earlier than the child poverty rate.












“These reports show good public policies are highly effective at changing life outcomes for children—in many instances they are the only tools that make a difference,” said Cooper. “Elected officials and their constituents have the opportunity to build the public will to adopt policies that protect children and strengthen the prospects of Chester County.”

Editors note: see full report at [<insert link>](#). PCCY's policy recommendations follow, as well as our two key graphics showing how children have fared since 2008 on each indicator and the Index for each domain. You are welcome to re-print these graphics; they are on the PCCY website as a jpegs: [<insert links>](#)

Policy Recommendations

- **Boost Job Longevity and Pay:** Increase the minimum wage and implement workforce supports including predictable scheduling and paid sick and family leave.
- **Increase Household Income:** Connect families to federal income and work supports like the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and SNAP.
- **Feed Hungry Children:** Expand participation in the school meals program.
- **Ensure Health Care Access:** Expand public health insurance to undocumented children.
- **Reduce Child Obesity:** Create a pay for performance metric for Medicaid Managed Care Organizations that will increase health care provider focus on child obesity.
- **Eliminate Child Lead Poisoning:** Ensure that publicly funded health providers test every child under three; remediate homes of pregnant women at high risk for lead hazards.
- **Increase School Attendance:** Improve how public health providers address asthma, including home visits to reduce home-based asthma triggers.
- **Cut the Teen Pregnancy Rate Further:** Increase access to long acting birth control for teens with Medicaid.
- **Expand the Reach of Early Intervention:** Expand the use of early screening tools to identify all children in need of early intervention services.
- **Make Quality Child Care Affordable:** Use state and county resources to incentivize providers to improve quality and enable providers that are already high quality to expand.
- **Expand Pre-K:** Increase state investment in pre-k to create a seat for every eligible child.
- **Grow Access to Full Day Kindergarten:** Remove financial barriers that limit school districts' ability to provide full day kindergarten.
- **Address the School Funding Crisis:** Increase state funds for public schools and distribute those funds through the Basic Education Funding Formula.

PCCY Child Wellness Index: Chester County Indicators

 ECONOMIC WELL-BEING	Children in Poverty 2008 5.5% 2014 9.9% 11,695 CHILDREN 	Children in Deep Poverty 2008 2.4% 2014 3.8% 4,494 CHILDREN 	Children Eligible for Subsidized School Meals 2008 14.3% 2014 19.9% 16,052 CHILDREN 	Children In Rent Burdened Households 2008 51.1% 2014 46.2% 9,896 CHILDREN 
	Teen Birth Rate PER 1000 GIRLS 2008 15.3 2014 9.4 169 BIRTHS 	Infants & Toddlers Not Screened for Lead 2008 88.4% 2014 78.4% 13,419 CHILDREN 	Uninsured Children 2008 4.6% 2014 6.8% 8,090 CHILDREN 	School Absenteeism 2008 4.6% 2014 4.6% 3,209 DAYS MISSED 
	Unmet Need for Publicly Funded Pre-K 2008 79.9% 2014 81.4% 4,370 CHILDREN 	Children in Low or Unknown Quality Child Care 2008 91.6% 2014 81.1% 5,479 CHILDREN 	Kindergartners Without Full Day K Access 2008 81.4% 2014 56.0% 2,453 CHILDREN 	Cost of Child Care 2008 \$19,727 2014 \$25,276 
	Per Student Spending 2008 \$8,575 2014 \$8,242 	Spending Gap: Highest and Lowest Wealth Districts 2008 \$3,612 2014 \$3,509 	Below Grade Level In Math 2008 16.7% 2014 15.1% 5,275 CHILDREN 	Below Grade Level In Reading 2008 17.5% 2014 17.7% 6,186 CHILDREN 
 K-12 EDUCATION				

